

## **The AQI and AIRNow: Providing Knowledge, Protecting Health**

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With the help of State and local meteorologists and air pollution professionals, AIRNow delivers air quality forecasts for more than 300 cities across the country. More than 150 of those cities even feature forecasts for particle pollution.

These forecasts are made using EPA's Air Quality Index (AQI), an important tool for disseminating simple information about air quality levels and corresponding health effects. The AQI uses a color-coded scale, with specific health information for sensitive individuals who might be affected by the air quality levels within that range.

For instance, the AQI forecast might read: Tomorrow is expected to be a code red air quality day. Particle pollution levels are expected to be unhealthy. People with heart or lung disease, older adults, and children should avoid strenuous activities.

Armed with this clear, concise information about expected future air quality levels, people can make important decisions to protect their health. In addition, AIRNow's real-time air quality maps inform the public about current conditions across the nation, again using the well-known AQI color scale.

AIRNow and the AQI have led to many partnerships. The Weather Channel, USA Today, national weather service providers, and many other news and weather organizations carry the AQI forecasts and data. These partners help ensure that the public, even those without Internet access, gets the message about protecting themselves from poor air quality.

AIRNow receives data and forecasts from a network of State, local, and Federal agencies. The data are automatically reviewed, combined, and used to create real-time maps and data products for distribution. The forecasts, besides being displayed on the AIRNow web site, are distributed to AIRNow's media partners.

The AQI ensures that the message is consistent. AIRNow and all its many partners use the same AQI color codes and health messages. With AIRNow as a collection and delivery mechanism, and the AQI as a public information tool, the public is assured of a timely, understandable message about their air quality and, more importantly, their health.